

★ news release

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# INTERIOR SEEKS INFORMATION ON ENDANGERED WILDLIFE

The Department is considering seeking legislation that would enable it to carry out a ten-year program of land acquisition to preserve the essential habitat of rare and endangered species. Suitable public lands will be utilized wherever possible. The recently enacted Land and Water Conservation Fund Bill will be a source of money for the program. Coordinating the operation is Daniel H. Janzen, former director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

In less than 150 years, nearly 40 birds and mammals have disappeared from the American scene, about half of them since 1900. A species is considered "rare" when its members are relatively few, but its survival does not appear to be an immediate problem; it is "endangered" when its survival is seriously threatened by loss of essential habitat, predation, disease, pollution, or other identifiable factors.

These are some of the species included in the Department's list:

California Condor: The Nation's largest soaring land bird weighs about 20 pounds, has a 8 1/2 to 9 1/2-foot wingspan and resembles a huge turkey vulture. It once ranged the Pacific Coast, but now is confined to the area around the southern Sierra Nevada and the coast ranges in southern California. Only 40 or 50 remain today. In years past it fed mostly on the carcasses of livestock, but as crops replaced much livestock and domestic animals were better cared for, the condor's food supply diminished. However, the main threat to this remnant population of condors is not starvation; it is man's thoughtless shooting.

Atlantic Salmon: New Englanders sought the once-abundant salmon as an important sport and commercial fish in the coastal streams and along the coast. But in the past 75 years both the sport and commercial catch dropped sharply. Today the salmon is found in limited numbers in only 8 Maine streams. Smaller than the Pacific salmon, the adult Atlantic species reaches 10 to 15 pounds. It is succumbing to pollution, obstructions caused by dam construction, and periodic major fluctuations in waterflows.

Florida Everglade Kite: It resembles a marsh hawk. The adult male is 16 to 18 inches long and has a wingspread of more than 40 inches. Once common in most sections of Florida, the Everglade kite is virtually extinct in the United States. It is an unusual bird of prey: it feeds almost entirely on one species of fresh-water snail. As marshes were drained in Florida, the snail began to disappear, followed by the kite. Today the kite is restricted to small fresh-water marshes in southern Florida and the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, southwest of West Palm Beach.

Attwater's Prairie Chicken: A close relative of the extinct heath hen of New England, it is native to the tall-grass prairie near the Gulf of Mexico in Texas and Louisiana. Its resonant sounds, once the "drums of the prairie," are becoming scarcer. Attwater's prairie chicken was pushed out of its home by the expansion of rice farming and the development of oil fields.

Black-Footed Ferret: This large weasel, with black feet and face mask, once made its way across the Great Plains and was also at home in the Rockies up to 10,500 feet. It stayed close to the prairie dog, its natural prey. The ferret began to decline with the destruction of the prairie dogs and the original grasslands. It faces extinction in the parts of North and South Dakota and Nebraska he still inhabits.

American Ivory-Billed Woodpecker: The largest woodpecker in North America sports shining black and white plumage, has a large white bill, and moves vigorously and gracefully. Its voice has a nasal sound somewhat like a toy tin trumpet. It once lived in the swamps of the southeastern States. This bird feeds on wood-boring insects found only in dead trees and nests in the cavities it digs in trees. The ivory bill began to disappear from its original range when loggers invaded the southern swamps and the forests were cut; the food supply disappeared with the forests. Some members of this species survive in Florida, east Texas, Louisiana, and South Carolina. Experts advise that forests must be managed to maintain a food supply for woodpeckers--if they are to survive.

Whooping Crane: It has teetered at the edge of oblivion since about 1910, but has managed to survive. The whooper is one of the world's rarest birds and the tallest indigenous bird of North America--over 5 feet. It has completely white plumage, except for black wing tips, weighs up to 25 pounds, and walks proudly on long black legs. When alarmed, it raises its head, opens its long, heavy bill, emits a piercing "ker-loo kerlee-loo," and takes flight on wings over 7 feet long.

A century ago the principal breeding range of the whoopers extended from central Illinois through northern Iowa, western Montana, and northwestern North Dakota to habitats in Canada. Even then they probably totaled fewer than 2,000. When the grasslands were ploughed for corn and wheat and the prairie sloughs were drained, the whoopers began to decline. Hunters sped their decline.

The surviving flock, about 32 birds, spends mid-October until mid-April in and near the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. From late spring into September and sometimes later, the whoopers occupy breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park, south-central Mackenzie Province, Canada. Between these 2 habitats is a narrow, 2,500-mile migration pathway across Saskatchewan, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

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(Note to Editors: Photographs of the California Condor, Attwater's Prairie Chicken, Black-Footed Ferret, and Whooping Crane may be obtained from the Fish and Wildlife Service Information Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C. 20240.)